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A Codebreaking Family in World War II January 25

It is not uncommon today for several generations of a single family to have worked at NSA. Children, parents, and in a few cases even grandparents have held positions in different parts of the agency over the years. Sometime over the next decade or two, if it has not happened already, the agency's first fourth-generation employee will walk through its doors.

During World War II, NSA's predecessor organizations in the Army and the Navy had not been in existence long enough for many parents and children to be serving in them at the same time. Nevertheless, there were a few such families. One was the Bundys of Massachusetts.

Harvey Bundy was not originally from New England but went there in 1909 to attend Yale and, subsequently, Harvard Law School. He then clerked for Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes and became a Boston attorney. Equally important were his senior positions in government, first as Assistant Secretary of State in the Hoover Administration and, crucially, as a personal assistant to Secretary of War Henry Stimson during World War II. In the latter position, he supported the Allies' military planning and was privy to their most closely guarded military secrets. These included the development of the atomic bomb and successes in breaking the codes and ciphers of the Axis powers, Germany and Japan.

It is not clear what role Harvey Bundy played, if any, in the careers that his wife, eldest son, and daughter-in-law would have in codebreaking during the war. Harvey and Katherine Putnam, who was descended from several prominent Boston families, had married in 1917. In 1941, with their children grown and America under the increasing threat of war, Katherine asked her friend Lydia Chapin Kirk if she knew of any way Katherine could be helpful. Kirk's husband was Rear Admiral Alan Kirk, head of Naval Intelligence. Katherine soon found herself working on coded messages hidden in seemingly innocuous letters and telegrams headed overseas, sending the results to the FBI. "I smoked like a chimney," she would tell an interviewer decades later, "and I got completely absorbed in code-breaking."

Harvey and Katherine's son William – who later would rise to prominence as at Assistant Secretary at State and Defense during the Kennedy and Johnson

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Administrations – showed an interest in cryptology even earlier, although he would not become involved in codebreaking for the government until a few months after his mother. While an undergraduate at Yale in the 1930s, William took an Army course in cryptology by mail. Another Yale student who took the course was William Kunstler, who as an attorney in the 1960s would defend antiwar activists opposed to the Vietnam policies his schoolmate had helped craft.

Drafted into the Army in 1941, William Bundy took his father's advice and applied for and was accepted to the Army's Signal Corps school at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, where Kunstler would join him. At the time, the Signal Corps school was where the Army groomed uniformed personnel to become codemakers and codebreakers. Having received some additional training, William became an instructor at the school. He later worked at Arlington Hall, the Army's wartime codebreaking facility.



William Bundy, during his service at Bletchley Park

In 1943, William was chosen to lead a small American contingent to Bletchley Park, Arlington Hall's counterpart in the UK. Once there, they would work side-by-side with their British colleagues in a secret program known as ULTRA to decrypt German military communications enciphered by the Enigma system. As the war in Europe was ending, he was sent into areas formerly occupied by the Nazis as a member of a joint US/UK team that collected encryption gear and interrogated Germans who had been involved in both securing German communications and seeking to break Allied ones. Years afterward, William would say his work at Bletchley was among the most important of his career.

Interestingly, while not a codebreaker himself, William's younger brother McGeorge might have seen some of the intelligence coming from Bletchley while in the Navy during the war. As an aide to Admiral Kirk, who had left Naval Intelligence and been given command of U.S. naval support to the Allied landings on D-Day, McGeorge's duties included reading intelligence forwarded by London, intelligence that was in part derived from Ultra decrypts. Later, like William, McGeorge would join the Kennedy and

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Johnson Administrations and serve as the National Security Advisor for both Presidents.

The final member of the Bundy family with a role in World War II codebreaking was William's wife Mary. The daughter of Assistant Secretary of State – and, a few years later under President Truman, Secretary of State – Dean Acheson, Mary married William in 1943 shortly before he went to Bletchley. She subsequently went to work at Arlington Hall and was assigned to the section that broke the encrypted messages of Japanese military attaches worldwide. Ones from Japanese officers assigned to Berlin were particularly valuable, as they provided insight into Germany's military thinking and, occasionally, detailed descriptions of its defenses along the coast of France. A bout of tuberculosis cut short her wartime service, however, and she spent the last few months of the war recuperating at a sanatorium in New York's Adirondack mountains. She resumed her career as a painter after her recovery and William's return from Europe.

A number of other World War II codebreakers may have made more significant individual contributions to the Allied war effort, but a strong case can be made that no family made a collective one greater than that made by the Bundys. Family members who serve together at NSA today are sustaining their legacy of service.

Sources: Harvey Bundy Obituary, *The New York Times*, October 8, 1963, 43.

Kai Bird, *The Color of Truth: William and McGeorge Bundy, Brothers in Arms*

David Sherman, 'From Improvisation to Permanence: The Anglo-American Signals Intelligence Relationship, 1940-1950.' Published online October 24, 2018 by the *Journal of Intelligence History*; to be released hard copy early 2019

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508 caption: A man in overseas cap and Army trench coat, hands on hips, staring sternly at the camera.

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